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ABSTRACT

Since independence, the government of Botswana has allowed only the use of English in government circles, excluding the other 26 languages represented in the country and allowing only limited use of the national language, Setswana. Since 1995, however, restrictions have been relaxed and non-government organizations are developing the use of other languages. One such organization, the Kamanakao Association, is working to revive Shiyeyi, the language and culture of the Wayeyi people of northwestern and north central Botswana, the third-largest tribe in the country. To accomplish this goal, the association is implementing activities in language and literacy development, cultural development, and training in translation, cultural studies, and development of literacy materials. The association has found great support among the Wayeyi people for learning Shiyeyi, especially because most of them do not read or write the language. By February 1998, the association had completed the orthography; produced a small hymn booklet and a booklet with stories, songs and poems; and conducted three training and research workshops. Ongoing projects include grammatical descriptions, development of a dictionary, and literacy classes for youth. Future projects will include rural literacy classes; a grammar booklet; a Jesus film; and training workshops in literacy material development. (Author/KC)

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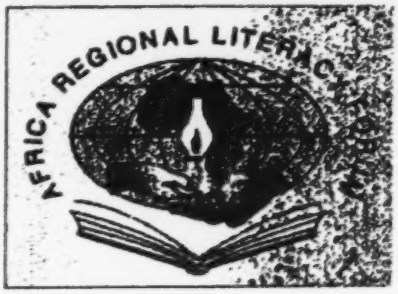

Language Development for Literacy: The Case of Shiyeyi in Botswana

Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo

Abstract

Since independence, the government of Botswana has practiced an exclusive language policy in which only English has been used in government circles at the exclusion of all the 26 languages represented in the country, with a limited use of the national language, Setswana. However, in recent years more positive statements have been heard in Parliament, opening up to recognize the use of other languages in education and society. These statements have provided a conducive environment for Non-governmental organizations to develop other languages for use in education and out-of-school literacy. This paper focuses on the work of one such organization. It reports on a project this organization is undertaking to revive the language and culture of the Wayeyi people in North Western, and Central Botswana. It gives findings on attitudes towards Shiyeyi as a language of instruction for literacy and shows how the preference expressed for Shiyeyi has great potential for a literacy program.

Background

The Wayeyi constitute about 40% of the population of the North West District in Botswana. The total population in this area as per 1991 census is 94 000. This means that they are about 37 000 Wayeyi in the district. There are also Wayeyi in the Central District and their number is not estimated. Those in Namibia their number is estimated at more than 20 000. In Botswana, they are the third largest tribe after the Batswana (made up of 8 dialects) and Bakalaka. They are the main makers of the famous Botswana baskets and the mokoro-poll bearers in the Okavango Delta. They were the first to settle the Delta. The Wayeyi are generally known as peace-loving people, a quality that proved detrimental to their social well being.

Around 1750 the Wayeyi were evaded by the Batawana (an off-shoot of the Bangwato) from the Central District who took their land and cattle and subjected them to some form of serfdom. This dominance, needless to say, affected the use of Shiyeyi language in social domains. So that while Wayeyi were and still are the majority, their language became a minority language. Also, due to multilingual nature of the district, and in the context of an exclusive language policy, this process subjected other languages, and not just Shiyeyi, to less use. The third factor was the

introduction of education in which Setswana and English are the medium of instruction in schools (Setswana for only four years).

To-date most of the Wayeyi especially the young, do not speak Shiyeyi while others (including adults) do not even know whether or not they are Wayeyi. Shiyeyi is currently described as one of the threatened or endangered languages in the world (Vossen, 1988, Jason and Underson, 1997). The youngest generation with a passive knowledge and comprehension of Shiyeyi are people in their twenties. Their children are less likely to speak it unless serious efforts are taken to revive it. The other problem compounding the use of Shiyeyi is the low prestige attached to it as a slave language. Those who can speak it and understand it, deny it. It is this attitude that will kill the language faster than its actual death. However, there are a few areas in some parts of the Northwest and Central Districts in which Wayeyi still speak and understand Shiyeyi, including the youth. In these areas Shiyeyi is used for daily living together with Setswana. Due to language contact, a few older speakers of other languages in the Districts do speak and/or understand Shiyeyi.

In 1962, Mr. Pitoro Seidisa (a Moyeyi from Gumare) started some work with Professor Westphal of the University of Cape Town to develop the orthography (a writing system), a dictionary and translate some Gospels. Due to conflicts between the Batawana and Wayeyi, Mr. Seidisa was imprisoned on his way from one of his meetings with Prof. Westphal in Cape Town. After collecting data, Mr. Seidisa went to Cape Town to work with Westphal. He then returned to collect more data, and it was during this trip that he was arrested at Seronga by Police Officer Rashiya (a Moyeyi) under the orders of the Sub-Chief Labane. Pitoro was handcuffed and tied to a bed for days, and his family was not allowed to see him. He was later transferred to Maun, and was imprisoned for months until he asked for permission to see the magistrate. The case was heard and Mr. Seidisa was acquitted of the offense. He then launched a case against Labane and Police officer Keetile for ill-treatment and unprecedented arrest. Regent Pulane dismissed the case as Labane and Keetile were her allies. As a result of this resistance against efforts to develop Shiyeyi, some of the projects Seidisa and Westphal started were not completed and whatever was done remained with Professor Westphal who stated in his will that the materials should be burnt after his death. Available correspondence between Seidisa (who died in 1990) indicate that Matthew chapter 8 (1-16) were translated, grammar books and the dictionary might or might not have been completed but work had gone on for sometime.

Kamanakao Association was formed in March 1995 by Wayeyi to continue the work of Mr.Seidisa and Professor Westphal. It is now a registered Non-Governmental organization in Botswana. As its name states (Kamanakao, the remnants), its overall objective is to develop and maintain the remnants of the Shiyeyi language and culture, as part of the overall national Setswana culture.

Objectives

1. To develop and maintain the Shiyeyi language and culture;

2. To carry out and disseminate research on Shiyeyi language, culture, traditions, customs,

life-styles, norms, believes and other related issues;

3. To cultivate an appreciation of and knowledge about the Shiyeyi culture;

4. To promote the storage, retrieval, dissemination and development of the Shiyeyi literary and cultural materials;

5. To collaborate with other bodies interested in the promotion and maintenance of language and culture.

Activities

In order to achieve the above objectives, Kamanakao's immediate and long term activities fall within four categories:

1. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: this includes development of

a. a writing system (orthography)

b. grammatical descriptions (grammar books)

c. a dictionary

2. LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: this includes

a. writing story booklets for children

b. writing primers/pamphlets on important messages for adult literacy

c. translating hymns and portions of the Bible

d. conduct literacy classes for adults and children

3. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:

a. develop a cultural center in which most of what is under 2 above could take place

b. training in cultural skills(e.g. canoeing) and other performances (dances)

c. conduct research on Shiyeyi language and culture

4. TRAINING : in

a. translation

b. cultural studies

c. literacy material development

Strategy to revive the language and Culture

The main strategy has been to conduct training and research workshops. These workshops have had three foci: 1) collecting data for developing the orthography 2) video and audio-taping oral literature and 3) collecting data on attitudes towards Shiyeyi with regard to preferences for literacy. Three such workshops have taken place in different villages and they have lasted for two days each. The workshops would normally be opened with a prayer in Shiyeyi by one village resident. The Chief of the village would give the official opening speech and a member of Kamanakao Village Committee would give a vote of thanks. Then a member of Executive Committee of the main branch would speak on the objectives and planned activities of the Association. This would be followed by a formal activity on the orthography with a qualified linguist providing sound descriptions and the people giving examples of such sounds. Within breaks there would be cultural dances, songs and poetry recitation which are recorded on audio and video tapes and later transcribed into booklets. There would also be presentation on the history of the village and its people and/or Wayeyi in general (this is part of a study for a book on the History of Wayeyi as told by Wayeyi). The last session is normally characterized by brainstorming on ways of promoting the use of Shiyeyi, how individuals can contribute to the work of the Association and planning for the next workshop. Below are some of the ways that have been suggested to advance the project and revive Shiyeyi:

a. How Individuals can contribute to the Activities of Kamanakao

- If you can write some stories, poems, songs etc. in Shiyeyi (or Setswana) and send them to Kamanakao Association, these will be part of the literacy booklets.
- If you cannot write - ask someone to sit down and write or tape record your stories, poems, songs, etc. and send them to Kamanakao, or inform them, they will come and record your stories.
- You can form a choral music group which sings gospel songs in Shiyeyi
- You can volunteer to translate this text and others into Shiyeyi
- You can volunteer to translate some hymns from your church into Shiyeyi
- You can translate the constitution of Kamanakao into Shiyeyi
- You can form a Shiyeyi traditional dance group in your village
- Write your ideas about improving Shiyeyi and send them to Kamanakao Ass.
- Ask the teacher in your village if you can tell Shiyeyi stories to his/her class once a month.
- Write and describe how to make a certain Shiyeyi artifact, such as kazhawa, endowa, mozhamboro etc.
- Write and describe how to cook Shiyeyi food such as mweende, enqguma, etc.
- Write and describe how Wayeyi bury their dead, how they hunt hippos, etc.
- List some Shiyeyi nouns, verbs etc.
- If you are a health worker, translate AIDS messages into Shiyeyi
- Everything you do or wish to do let us know how we can help you so that it becomes part of our projects.

b. How Individuals can advance the maintenance and Use of Shiyeyi

This is a crucial question to be answered if Shiyeyi is to grow, maintained and appreciated. The following are suggested ways:

- SPEAK it all the time you are speaking to someone you know can respond in Shiyeyi
- SPEAK it to your children, encourage them to learn it
- SPEAK it to God in Prayer
- SPEAK it in sermon to God
- SPEAK it during funeral services (announcements etc.)
- SING it in funeral services and burials
- Write in it to your friends and colleagues
- Write it on funeral programs for Wayeyi
- Write news items and send them to Newspapers in Shiyeyi
- READ it and about it and its people
- TELL people that you are a proud Moyeyi
- REFUSE to be called a mokoba, it is an insult meant to tarnish your-self image and render you none assertive.
- TAKE those who call you a mokoba to justice
- ASK your Member of Parliament, Councilor, Chief etc. to speak to you in Shiyeyi or have someone to translate into Shiyeyi if he/she cannot .
- If you are in court REQUEST that you speak in Shiyeyi if you think you can better express yourself that way - there will be translation into English.
- Give your children Shiyeyi names
- Tell them about your days of slavery, not to anger them, but to help them appreciate the achievement of freedom

All these strategies will provide a conducive environment and attitude for literacy in Shiyeyi.

c. Survey on Attitudes towards Shiyeyi for Literacy

The workshops are attended by mainly Wayeyi and very few people from other ethnic groups like Kalanga in Xumu. On the first morning of the workshop, people register to get folders with information on the Association. They pay a registration fee of one Pula (about $0. 20). During registration they give their name, address, age, state of literacy, whether they are in school or not and whether they speak Shiyeyi or not, whether they understand only and whether they would prefer to learn to read and write in Shiyeyi. The table below shows the results of the survey.

Table 1: Age and literacy status

Venue	Total # of Participants	# that filled the survey	Age10-25	Age 26-40	Age 41+	Literate
Maun	200+	187	47	88	52	135 (72%)
Motopi	102	77	23	32	22	40 (52%)
Xumu	124	91	21	33	37	66 (73%)
Totals	**426**	**355**	**91 (26%)**	**153 (43%)**	**111 (31%)**	**241 (67%)**

Table 2 - Other Variables

Venue	In School	Can Speak	understands only	Can read in Shiyeyi	Would like to learn to Read and write in Shieyeyi
Maun	21	77	102	22	110
Motopi	15	30	52	9	68
Xumu	17	56	67	12	70
Totals	**53 (15%)**	**163 (46%)**	**221 (62%)**	**43 (12%)**	**248 (70%)**

The tables indicate the following:

- Most participants are literate in Setswana (67%);
- They however, said they cannot read in Shiyeyi (only 12% could);
- They said they would like to learn to read and write in Shiyeyi (70%);
- Most people have passive knowledge of Shiyeyi (62%);
- Attendance of those in school is low (15%);

Further data analysis indicated the following:

- Most of those in school do not speak Shiyeyi (81%);
- They all said they would like to learn to read and write;
- Those who could read in Setswana said they could not read in Shiyeyi (55%) (67-12);
- All those who could speak Shiyeyi said they would like to learn to read and write in Shiyeyi;
- Most attendants are aged between 26 and 40 which is encouraging.

Conclusions on the survey

- Efforts must be directed to sensitizing those in school;
- More materials should be developed to encourage those who are already literate in Setswana to extend their reading skills to Shiyeyi;
- Literacy classes could stimulate those with passive knowledge of Shiyeyi to utilize it;
- There is great potential for literacy program to succeed.

There is great potential to revive the language. If the middle aged, who are the majority in the workshops, can gain a sense of self-worthy as Wayeyi and begin to speak the language to their children, the language can survive. The starting point is

self-discovery and appreciation of ones language and culture.

Why is Kamanakao Association engaged in this Training program?

Kamanakao is engaged in the above activity in acknowledgment of the following facts:

- Language and culture are fundamental elements in development. The reality in our society is that while we have a common language, Setswana, we also speak different languages and represent different but similar cultural backgrounds. All these are necessary to form a rich and diverse culture to be proud of as a nation. Pruning and hiding some of these diverse cultures and languages is impoverishing our potentially rich culture. To be a part of the global village in development we must have something to offer, least we become objects rather than participants in global change. The richer our culture, the more resistant it will be to the strongest winds of change and more sustainable it will be as our contribution to the world around us.
- Individuals' competence in the language in which decisions are made, the greater their chance to participate in the decision making process. Decision making is the tool for development. Everyone in our society has a language in which they have greater ability to communicate their ideas on issues that affect their lives in the development process. In order to empower everyone, and enhance their opportunities to participate in development, we must provide them with opportunities whenever possible to make decisions in their own languages. Our commitment to development must be a commitment to the acknowledgment of both our points of convergence and divergence as enrichment tools for development.
- Literacy programs become successful when reading materials contain information the learners can relate to. They learn to read and write by doing so on issues that are familiar to their cultural experiences. This enhances their self-esteem, which is one of the determinants of academic achievement. Adult literacy materials written in Setswana have not been successful in providing literacy skills in non-Setswana speaking communities. Further, within the context of a language policy that has promoted English beyond reasonable bounds, our people in Setswana speaking communities have demanded English in their adult literacy classes. The result of this is non-literacy. Children in non-Setswana speaking areas underachieve year after year. An acknowledgment of our languages as resources for development, and not enemies to be regretted, would turn this around and facilitate our vision for an educated and informed society. A literacy project on 'bread making' would best benefit the community if the manual on how to build a fire-stove, to repair it, and to make and market the product is written in the language of daily communication within that community.
- One thing we are certain about is that God is just, and could not have created all these languages only to play a negative role or no role at all. Slowly, it has become apparent that exclusion of these languages has more adverse consequences for development.

Is Kamanakao acting against Government Policy

The answer is NO.

- Recommendation 32 of the White Paper No. 2 of 1994 on the Revised National Policy on Education recommended that a third language (in addition to Setswana and English) could be opted for studying at Junior Certificate level. (p63). Therefore, Shiyeyi (or any other) could be this third language. It needs to be developed so that it can be one of those children can opt for.
- Recommendation 3 of the same paper states that the National Setswana Language Council be renamed the Botswana Languages Council and be given revised terms of Reference, including the responsibility for developing a comprehensive language policy (p13). This policy will include the use of other languages and not just Setswana. This means government no longer wants to exclude other languages from being developed and used.
- In 1994 Government passed approved the review of sections 78 to 79 of the Constitution which stipulates only chiefs of the 8 tribes as ex-officio members of the House of Chiefs. This means that government will in the near future empower all tribes (who wish to) to have representation in the house of Chiefs.
- On Friday August 8, 1997 Parliament passed a motion to allow all languages to be taught in schools, used on the radio and other areas as necessary. This means Shiyeyi can also be taught and we have to show government that we like that and we are doing something to help in this matter.
- The National Long Term Vision (commonly known as Vision 2016) states that " there is a challenge to recognize and develop equally all languages in Botswana" (p21, summary version).
- All of the above are positive signals to a commitment to pluralism as a necessary ingredient for nation building have been made in Parliament in recent years. These are an acknowledgment of the fact that suppression of our languages and cultures is not one of the ingredients for democracy or development, and could defeat our purpose for building a united and proud nation.

Kamanakao Association is one of the organizations assisting government to achieve the goal of recognizing and developing other languages for literacy as a necessary tool for development. It is willing to assist other groups to develop their languages so that Batswana can know and walk hand in hand with one another with pride and dignity in the hearts of all. This is necessary for unity and development.

Achievements thus far

Completed Projects: By February 1998, the following had been achieved: the orthography was completed, a small hymn booklet was produced, a booklet with stories, songs and poems was produced. The booklets have been re-printed on demand. Three training and research workshops were conducted.

On-going projects: Grammatical descriptions, a dictionary is being developed, and

literacy classes have began in one area for the youth. Three other areas have been identified for literacy to begin. The Jesus Film based on the book of Luke is being translated into Shiyeyi. The Association produces a calendar each year with Bible verses, it also produces T-shirts and bags for sale and promotion of literacy in Shiyeyi.

Planned projects: Begin literacy classes in two rural areas, complete grammar booklet and complete the Jesus Film, and continue with training workshops in literacy material development.

Conclusion

In addition to completed projects, one of the greatest achievements of the Association thus far has been the feeling of revival, enthusiasm and renewed sense of self-worth and confidence amongst Wayeyi. Most of the people who would not identify themselves as Wayeyi have slowly begun to show up. Those who could not speak it in public places now can. The demand for reading materials in Shiyeyi is high. Funerals are now characterized with Shiyeyi songs in some communities. Choral music in Shiyeyi is developing. Individuals write to the Association expressing their appreciation of what it is doing and its eagerness to learn Shiyeyi language and culture. Here are extracts from letters:

My friend, I don't know Seyeyi, I tell my parents hundred times to teach me they refused to teach me, what I am going to do is, I will find other people to teach me only. And you also, you will teach me if you like. I want you to write a song called Panakani for me, I like that song very much indeed. (from KT. Box 10. Khumaga).

I am hereby applying for a help of the oral tradition (Bayei) I am asked to research about any oral tradition. I am interested on researching about Bayei. I am a girl of fifteen yeas old, I am Moyei. I am doing form 2 in Moeti Secondary School. (from Miss TB, P/Bag 148. Maun).

Training and research workshops will continue to yield better results in many ways: self-esteem, more reading materials, desire to learn to read and write in Shiyeyi and an appreciation of the Shiyeyi language and culture. What is encouraging about the letters is that they are mostly from the youth in school, which indicates their willingness to learn Shiyeyi. This positive attitude is necessary for developing literacy programs. Parents must therefore, begin to talk to their children in Shiyeyi as it is the best way they could learn the language and later learn to read it.

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